



Iowa Outdoors

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Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

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1. License Buyers Donate More Than \$10,000 to Catch Poachers
2. Quail Buffer Cost-Share Expanded Statewide – by Joe Wilkinson
3. Trout Stocking This Friday at Banner Lakes
4. Area Hunts Reduce Deer Numbers – by Joe Wilkinson
5. Osterkamp Named Supervisor of Fisheries in Northeast Iowa Department of Natural Resources
6. Post-Season Gun Care – by Joe Wilkinson

LICENSE BUYERS DONATE MORE THAN \$10,000 TO CATCH POACHERS

DES MOINES – Hunters and anglers have donated more than \$10,000 since September to the Iowa Turn In Poachers program through a \$2 donation offered through the Electronic Licensing System for Iowa. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will present the TIP Iowa Board a \$10,000 check in February.

The donations are used by the private TIP organization for reward payments to informants on successful Iowa TIP cases and for promoting TIP.

“This money was donated voluntarily by Iowa license buyers at the point of sale that will directly help the TIP program, to help protect the wild resources here in Iowa, and the hunters and anglers in our state,” said Steve Dermand, TIP board representative for the Iowa DNR.

For more information, contact Dermand at 515-281-4515.

QUAIL BUFFER COST-SHARE EXPANDED STATEWIDE

By Joe Wilkinson

Even an admitted “non birdwatcher” can identify that high-pitched “*bob white*” call, indicating that a quail is nearby. Those calls, though, come less and less frequently anymore in Iowa and throughout the country. From 1980 to 1999, biologists estimate quail populations dropped from 59 million to 20 million birds nationwide.

In Iowa, we sit at the northern edge of the northern bobwhite quail’s range. Go north of the southern couple tiers of counties and sightings of the round little game bird are rare. There are pockets of them. Each year, I come across a covey or two in Cedar County. I’ve seen them in Johnson County, too, but I don’t hear of many north of here. On average, wildlife officials see about 0.7 quail per 30-mile roadside survey conducted by the Department of Natural Resources each summer, less than half the long term average. And even with all the northern routes showing no quail, that still doesn’t add up to much in the southern zone.

Help is on the way, though, for quail and grassland songbirds hit hard by land use changes in Iowa. And while more will be needed, it is a start.

Landowners throughout Iowa can receive rental payments and other incentives to establish buffer strips along crop field edges through the continuous Conservation Reserve Program. Previously, the “quail buffer” program was targeted at southern Iowa. The buffers provide travel corridors and critical food and cover for quail and various songbirds.

“Our quail populations are in decline, observes DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. “A lot of farming practices have changed. We don’t have the fencerows we saw 50 years ago or cattle in pastures. Quail like that sort of habitat. By putting these buffer strips next to woody vegetation, that will give them the change in habitat they need.”

The continuous Conservation Reserve Program strip doesn’t take large acreages out of production. Myron Smalley seeded a small area in his field in Johnson County. When it comes up this year, the mix of prairie grasses and forbs (flowers) will provide overhead cover and food that was lacking. “I was putting in filter strips, and had about an acre that I thought should be in some type of reserve program. It’s on a hill, butting right up to the highway,” explains Smalley. His buffer strip is about 50 feet wide.

“This is the time when farmers are planning for the next crop year. It’s a good time to work upland bird habitat buffers into your plans,” suggests Steve Carson, from the USDA’s Farm Service Agency office in Johnson County. “There’s a signing incentive of \$100 an acre up front and then after cost-share is paid, FSA will pay another 40 percent equivalent to that cost-share payment.” Carson says just under 16,000 acres are allocated, in any county in the state. Payment is based on soil types. We’re looking at a diverse grass and forb mixture that will provide adequate habitat for quail and the grassland songbirds,” says Carson.

Wildlife biologists from the DNR can also assist with enrollment. Call (515) 281-5918 for the name of a biologist near you. Or, contact the local office at your USDA Farm Service Agency.

TROUT STOCKING THIS FRIDAY AT BANNER LAKES

INDIANOLA -- The third of four winter trout stockings at Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park near Indianola is set for Friday, DNR fisheries staff announced today.

Approximately 1,000 catchable-size rainbow trout will be released in south Banner Lake around noon, said Dick McWilliams, a fisheries biologist with the Iowa DNR. A fourth and final stocking is planned for March.

McWilliams stressed, though, that ice conditions are poor at Banner and ice fishing is not recommended. Currently, 40 percent of the lake is ice-free, and the ice that is present is unsafe. He said anglers will have plenty of opportunities to catch trout in the open water areas.

Banner Lakes is the only trout fishing opportunity in central and southern Iowa, and is one of only four Iowa lakes stocked with trout. The other three are Blue Pit in Mason City, North Prairie Lake in Cedar Falls and Heritage Pond in Dubuque.

AREA HUNTS REDUCE DEER NUMBERS

By Joe Wilkinson

CEDAR RAPIDS -- More than 630 deer were harvested by hunters in seven urban or park hunts in the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids corridor this fall and early winter. The special hunts were in addition to regular hunting pressure in rural areas, "county-specific" antlerless tags and two rural deer zones; one each in Linn and Johnson counties. The added hunting pressure was designed to reduce populations in areas where deer had become traffic safety and/or vegetation damage concerns. Statewide, 41 special park or urban hunts were held in 2005-06.

Nearly half of those I-380 corridor whitetails — 289 — were taken by bowhunters in Cedar Rapids, during the city's return to a management hunt. The hunt ended Sunday.

In Coralville, police say 139 deer were taken by bowhunters in the sixth year of the city's deer management program.

A few miles away, near Tiffin, officials with the Johnson County Conservation Board say hunters tallied 65 deer at F.W. Kent Park. There, bowhunters are allowed from October through late January, except during the first two weekends of Iowa's December shotgun

seasons, when gun hunters are in the park. The gun hunt marked its 10th year in 2005. “We’ve had some folks participating in our shotgun hunt since the beginning,” noted Director Harry Graves. “It’s gratifying that with all the special hunts in place now, they remain loyal to the hunt here.”

Hunters were required to shoot antlerless deer, though some special hunts offer a few “any sex” tags as incentives, should enough antlerless deer be removed. Hunters were urged to identify and shoot does, rather than non-antlered “button bucks,” and the harvests showed a predominance of does taken. In Cedar Rapids, for instance, 268 of the 289 deer were adult does or doe fawns. Participants in special park or urban hunts are required to hunt within specified boundaries. Most also are required to pass a proficiency test.

Bowhunters took 49 deer in Lake Macbride State Park, during the park’s first-ever management hunt; from Oct. 1 to Dec. 18. The hunt was implemented to reduce deer numbers in the park, five miles west of Solon. Hunters reported harvesting 45 does or doe fawns and four button bucks. “It was a successful hunt. It should make a noticeable drop in our population,” observed Macbride park manager Gwen Prentice. “We plan to conduct a hunt next season, too.”

Near Mount Vernon, hunters harvested 10 whitetails over the same dates during the first hunt within Palisades-Kepler State Park’s boundaries. Like other park hunts, those at Macbride and Palisades-Kepler were established after a noticeable “browse line” appeared in wooded areas, indicating deer were feeding too heavily on understory vegetation, thus impacting other wildlife and plant species. Prentice noted that no complaints were received from surrounding landowners, park users or hunters.

At Squaw Creek County Park near Marion, 43 deer were taken in the annual bow hunt. Within the City of Marion, bowhunters no longer need a specific “city tag,” but may hunt within city limits with regular or antlerless tags after registering with the city. Police expect about 40 deer to be reported, as hunters are contacted in the coming days.

Just outside the I-380 corridor, near Brighton, the state’s oldest “park hunt” (since 1991) is conducted at Lake Darling State Park. Though not included in the “corridor” total, shotgun season hunters harvested 66 deer during their December dates.

OSTERKAMP NAMED SUPERVISOR OF FISHERIES IN NORTHEAST IOWA

MANCHESTER – Karen Osterkamp, a 13-year veteran of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries bureau, has been named as the new supervisor for the northeast Iowa region, replacing Dave Moeller, who retired Dec. 30 after 33 years.

Osterkamp, 37, will oversee fish management offices in Guttenberg, Manchester, Decorah and two in Bellevue. The 15-county region is home to Iowa's trout country and a popular river fishing system.

"I'm looking forward to working in a broader sense with our streams, the Mississippi River and continuing the good work we are already doing, and enhancing that," Osterkamp said.

The Guttenberg native has worked four years at Lake Rathbun, seven at Guttenberg, and most recently nearly two as the manager at the Decorah trout hatchery. "I'm excited about this opportunity, being a native of northeast Iowa," she said. "It's nice to still be in this part of the state, protecting our natural resources for the next generation."

Osterkamp will begin her official duties Jan. 29, as she wraps up a few projects in Decorah. Osterkamp has one son, Calvin, 15, and daughter, Caitlin, 13.

For more information, contact Osterkamp at Decorah 563-382-8324, or Manchester at 563-927-3276.

POST-SEASON GUN CARE

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The white cotton patch went into the bore clean. Pulling it out of my 20-gauge "deer gun," it had picked up streaks of dark gray; residue from shots fired. Normal, you might say, except that my gun was clean. Rather, I should say, I had cleaned my gun. There's a difference.

With Iowa's pheasant and deer seasons closing (okay, except for a few January late season deer tags) most firearms are headed to storage. And most will get at least a cursory cleaning before being locked away in the gun cabinet or closet. Running the cleaning rod through your firearm should pick up most powder residue and microscopic flakes of lead. That's what blackens your cleaning patch on the first swipe. However, getting most of it is not getting *all* of it.

"We see more and more guns not getting routine maintenance," acknowledges Iowa City gunsmith Pat Childs. "At the end of the season, (a hunter) should clean the barrel of all that residue and lightly oil it; external surfaces, too." Often, by the time a hunter brings a gun in for work, problems have developed. "Upland hunters, might have something as simple as a weed seed that has worked into the gun; into the trigger group or the bolt, causing a malfunction. Maybe a bur has developed on a part."

With the boom in deer hunting, plastic-cased sabots fired down rifled barrels leave their own calling cards. “The biggest culprit is plastic residue left in the barrel,” notes Childs, who works the gun shop at Fin & Feather in Iowa City. “Rust develops underneath that plastic and can pit the barrel. Besides that, recoil increases. Extraction of the shell is less efficient; especially with the semi-automatics.”

And, obviously, accuracy is affected. Childs suggests looking at the rifling visible at the edge of the barrel. It should show a “square” appearance. A build up of plastic will round off that precision-milled rifling. “That rifling is to spin the sabot. If it doesn’t go spinning out of the barrel, the slug is not stabilized (in flight),” he says.

That’s what sent me down to the basement. For years, I have used a pretty well known cleaning solvent and lubricant; a company that makes gun cleaning kits. You might use it, too. Child suggests getting more aggressive. “Get a potent enough solvent to dissolve plastic particles. Use a bronze brush, the same gauge as your gun barrel. It is going to take several cleanings,” he urges. “If (your patch) comes out gray, keep working on it.” I took his recommended solvent (Shooter’s Choice) and ran a patch through a couple times. It came out charcoal gray...from a gun that I had already cleaned. Though not a high-end firearm, it is a nice semi-automatic deer gun; one I want to use for years. I ran 10 or 12 cloth patches through it; alternating between solvent, dry and lubricants and was still getting a ‘touch of gray’.

Childs also recommends taking your firearm completely apart and cleaning those internal parts, not just working a rod through the barrel and rubbing down the external parts.

If you plan on keeping your gun for years to come, a family heirloom, it makes sense to spend the extra time and effort to keep it spotless. If you just want to trade up in a few years, it also pays dividends. “A clean gun, one that functions properly, is worth more than a rusty one,” Childs declares.

I better swab one more time. That patch isn’t white yet.

End of Season Gun Care Tips

- Clean it before you put it away. Wipe down all external parts, too. Do NOT store in its carrying case. That will trap moisture.
- Store it in a dry location. A dehumidifier now can avoid problems later, if your guns will be in the damp basement for the next eight months.
- Give your gun a heavier coating of oil if you are storing it. Don’t forget to clean it, though, before using it again, going back to the light coating for hunting season.
- Tear down the entire firearm to clean and lubricate it. The instruction manual should have a schematic of the parts if you get lost.
- For muzzleloaders especially, clean it after each use. Modern “in line” models are pretty easy to clean. Removal of the breech plug allows you to clean the entire

barrel. And blackpowder models, even cleaner burning powder pellets still cause a lot of fouling.

- If you're not sure how to do it, have a gunsmith keep your firearm investment in good shape. Expect to pay \$30-\$40 to have it torn down, cleaned, de-burred and inspected.